

Scott County Chancery Court to begin e-filing Feb. 15

February 8, 2010

Scott County Chancery Court will begin accepting voluntary electronic filing of court documents Feb. 15. Electronic filing becomes mandatory April 1, according to an order signed by Chancery Judge H. David Clark II.

Scott County Chancery Court is participating in the Mississippi Electronic Courts (MEC) pilot project. The MEC system is modeled on the one used by federal courts. MEC has adapted the federal model for use in state courts.

The system allows attorneys to file their pleadings and retrieve documents via the Internet, and makes court records more accessible to the public.

Judge Clark said, "Eventually, our courts will be essentially paperless and will be available over the internet for not only the attorneys but the general public."

He noted that court documents such as those in adoption proceedings are not public, and that will not change with electronic filing.

Training for attorneys and law office staff in the use of the e-filing system will be conducted in the IT Training Room at the Gartin Building in Jackson. Training sessions are scheduled for Feb. 11, 16, 18, 23 and 25. Additional sessions will be scheduled later.

Judge Clark served on a committee which recommended guidelines for the development of a statewide electronic filing and case management system for the trial courts.

Scott, Madison and Warren County Chancery Courts and the Madison County Circuit Court are participating in the pilot project. Madison County Chancery Court began accepting voluntary e-filing July 22, 2009, and mandatory electronic filing went into effect in Madison County Chancery Court on Sept. 15, 2009. Work is underway to adapt the electronic filing system for use in Madison County Circuit Court. Warren County Chancery Court began work with MEC staff on Jan. 12. The first steps are analysis of the court's needs and training of court staff.

The electronic filing system will allow attorneys to file documents or read court documents any hour of the day or night, without having to make a trip to the clerk's office. It will speed filing and save time, travel and postage costs, Judge Clark said.

"There will be no paper, no ink, no postage. It's a whole lot faster and a lot less expensive," Judge Clark said. "I think it's going to be much more convenient and much more efficient for the attorneys and for the litigants."

No fees will be charged to the general public to view documents during the pilot program. A page viewing charge is expected to be adopted at a later date. The amount of fees has not yet been set.

A public access terminal in the Scott County Chancery Clerk's office will accommodate anyone who does not have internet access.

Judge Clark for a number of years has used his own computerized system in the Second Chancery District, which includes Scott, Newton and Jasper counties. From his office in Forest, he keeps track of dockets for cases filed in Bay Springs, Paulding and Decatur as well as Forest.

In the past, documents have been filed in paper form in the Second Chancery District, but were scanned as electronic images into a vendor-provided system. During the pilot project, Scott County Chancery Court will maintain the paper files, the vendor-provided imaging system and the MEC system.

Judge Clark said, "For a while we will have some redundancy built in, but ultimately we will be paperless."

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